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A Contest of Ideas

Allen W. Dulles, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, made a thought-provoking speech last week in which he said:

"In introducing mass education, the troubled Soviet leaders have loosed forces dangerous to themselves. It will be very difficult for them henceforth to close off their own people from access to the realities of the outside world."

It was a particularly apt observation in the context of its timing. It was made in the same week that Marshal Tito was standing up to the men from the Kremlin; he had made them come to him; with a fine touch of symbolism he was "in the driver's seat" when he took them for an automobile ride around Belgrade; and he had got the admission from Russia that other Communist countries had a right to coexistence without subservience.

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Questions posed by Mr. Dulles became particularly timely in this connection. If Titoist heresy can be forgiven and approved, how can the Soviet Union deny its European satellites the right to the same heresies? If the Kremlin adopts the idea of coexistence, then Western free systems must be permissible as a new way of life and, if permissible anywhere, why not in the Soviet Union itself? And finally, can the Soviet Union give its people a better material education and still keep them from wanting more and thinking more?

His general theme was that an educated people reaches out for more knowledge and more information, and does more thinking for itself.

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Mr. Dulles did not presume to offer a timetable of change, but "one can say with assurance that, in the long run, man's desire for freedom must break any bonds that can be placed around him."

That is where education comes in. Man's desire for freedom may be inherent, inborn, but to one who has never known freedom, perhaps never heard of liberty, it is a vague, undefined longing without shape and without purpose.

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Education and the concept of liberty is not necessarily a guarantee of peace. Two rulers of Germany in this century led an educated people into war. What was lacking in them was moral fiber.

That is the difference between totalitarianism and freedom.

Mr. Dulles thinks that Russia's advances in the physical sciences may well lead to other advances, that freedom to seek truth in the scientific realm will lead to seeking truth in economics and the humanities.

If so, it is a good augury.

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In the judgment of the historian Arnold J. Toynbee there are today two Great Powers in the world. They play the game differently. Dr. Toynbee asserts that America's West European allies "are every bit as much at America's mercy as Russia's East European satellites are at hers," that America, if she had chosen, could have done all that Russia has done, occupied the territories, installed puppet regimes, established a strangle-hold [illegible]

America never thought of such a thing and never will. This country, Dr. Toynbee thinks, may have been handicapped by her scruples. He suspects that Russia thinks America a fool for her pains.

He does not, however, ignore the moral aspects of power. He says that "while power is undoubtedly force, force itself is not exclusively physical; military force nowadays more than ever, needs economic and political sinews, and these sinews, in their turn, need moral fiber."

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Some have been alarmed by the number of scientists and engineers being turned out by Russian schools. Mr. Dulles estimates the Russians will have graduated 1,200,000 engineers to our 900,000 in the 1950s decade.

It is something to be concerned about, but it has a brighter side. Educated men and women question. They are less amenable to "thought control." They begin to see other ways and discover other ethical and political concepts.

Competing with us on our own terms, the Russians are bound to be formidable antagonists. Mr. Dulles warns that in key areas Soviet manpower may well outnumber this country's by 1960. Russia's top scientists, although still fewer in number, are now the equal of top men in the West, he says.

We should welcome peaceful competition, however. It is what we want; it is the basis of our international relations. It is for the ultimate good of the whole world.